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Mind games! NIH teaches kids about the power of the human brain

Brain Awareness Week activities to be held March 16-17

Inquisitive students and their teachers from the Washington, D.C., area will explore the fascinating and multifaceted human brain at the 12th annual Brain Awareness Week celebration at the National Museum of Health and Medicine, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, on March 16 and 17. Students in grades 5 through 8 will engage in interactive activities sponsored by six institutes from the National Institutes of Health that focus on brain health and research. Students and teachers will see an actual human brain and talk with NIH scientists about how the brain works to create the human experience, as well as careers students might explore in the neuroscience field.

Brain Awareness Week is an annual international partnership of government agencies, scientific organizations, and university and volunteer groups. It was begun 16 years ago by the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives, a nonprofit organization of more than 200 preeminent neuroscientists dedicated to advancing brain education.

“Brain Awareness Week is a wonderful opportunity for students to learn about the most exciting and complex organ in their bodies,” said the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Dr. Nora D. Volkow. “They will explore how the brain works and what happens when it becomes altered by disease or drugs. We hope that what they see, learn and experience will inspire them to become neuroscience researchers who will one day make ground-breaking discoveries about the brain.”

- **National Institute on Drug Abuse**

Students will play an interactive game called NIDA Brain Derby. They will be divided into two teams to answer questions related to how drugs act in the brain and body, and how young people’s brains are influenced by illicit drugs. The winners will receive a Brain Scientist certificate.

- **National Institute on Mental Health**

Students will be fooled into thinking that a rubber hand is actually part of their own body and how mirror therapy can reduce phantom limb pain in amputees. Students will also explore the Memory and the Brain activity, to learn how memories are stored in the brain, and what happens when even a small part of the brain is damaged.

- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**

Students will play Cool Spot Carnival, which uses materials from the NIAAA website for kids to show how alcohol interferes with sensory perception, movement, and balance. Carnival activities also include games such as Pick Your No's—which demonstrates effective ways to say no to alcohol. Students will then play a football-toss game while wearing fatal vision goggles that simulate being under the influence of alcohol.

- **National Institute on Aging**

Students will be engaged in a discussion about brain aging focusing on how the brain and cognitive function – thinking, learning, and memory – change with age. The presentation will also focus on emerging evidence about a possible connection between some healthy lifestyle habits and prevention of cognitive decline, like Alzheimer's disease, in later life.

- **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**

Students will learn about the four lobes of the human brain in the Brain Lobe-oratorium. This hands-on exhibit will show what each lobe does relative to perception, thinking, personality, and behavior.

- **Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD)**

Step inside NICHD's novel, multi-sensory exhibit and see the amazing Drunken Brain, pulsating with electricity and basking in a world of colored lights and eerie sounds. Dr. Dennis Twombly will explain some of the effects of alcohol on the brain, and how alcohol exposure during pregnancy and adolescence can lead to possible brain damage and alcohol addiction later in life.

- **National Museum of Health & Medicine**

The Brain Collector: Archie Fobbs, collections manager of the National Museum of Health and Medicine's Neuroanatomical Collections, will use specimens from the world's largest brain collection to demonstrate functional aspects of the brain and the important roles it plays in everyday life. Students will learn about basic malfunctions of the nervous system and their consequences. For more information about the museum, visit www.nmhm.washingtondc.museum

This event is located on an Army post, so media wishing to attend must contact Melissa Brachfeld at 202-782-2671 to pre-register. If applicable, vehicle information (make, model, color, license plates and state of registration) should be provided. Media should use the main entrance at 6900 Georgia Avenue, NW, which intersects with Elder Street.

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The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy and improve practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at www.drugabuse.gov. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's new DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or fax or email requests to 240-645-0227 or drugpubs@nida.nih.gov. Online ordering is available at <http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov>. NIDA's new media guide can be found at <http://drugabuse.gov/mediaguide/>.

The mission of the NIMH is to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery and cure. For more information, visit www.nimh.nih.gov.

NIAAA is America's authority on alcohol research and health. The primary U.S. agency for conducting and supporting research on the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of alcohol abuse, alcoholism, and alcohol problems, NIAAA also disseminates research findings to general, professional, and academic audiences. Additional alcohol research information and publications are available at www.niaaa.nih.gov.

NIA leads the federal effort supporting and conducting research on aging and the medical, social and behavioral issues of older people. For more information on research and aging, go to www.nia.nih.gov.

NINDS is the nation's primary supporter of biomedical research on the brain and nervous system. The Institute supports and conducts basic translational and clinical research on the healthy and diseased nervous system, fosters the training of investigators and seeks better understanding, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of neurological disorders. For more information, visit www.ninds.nih.gov.

The mission of NICHD is to ensure that every person is born healthy and wanted, that women suffer no harmful effects from reproductive processes, and that all children have the chance to achieve their full potential for healthy and productive lives. In pursuit of these goals, NICHD supports a broad spectrum of research on normal and abnormal human development, including contraception, fertilization, pregnancy, childbirth, prenatal and postnatal development, and childhood development through adolescence. The mission areas also include research on intellectual and developmental disabilities and rehabilitation medicine. More detailed information can be found at: http://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/org/supported_by.cfm

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — *The Nation's Medical Research Agency* — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.